

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

051709Z Jul 05

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001209

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL PINR KDEM NI

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OBASANJO ANNOUNCES NEW MINISTERS,
PLANS CABINET RESHUFFLE

REF: (A) ABUJA 1186 (B) ABUJA 1119

Summary

1. On July 5, President Obasanjo sent a list of 11 ministerial nominees to the Senate for approval, indicating that he plans to drop some of the current Cabinet, possibly to give those with political ambitions the opportunity to focus on 2007 rather than policy making and implementation. The list of nominees suggests that the President wants to give more powers to the economic management team, but as is the custom in Nigeria, the President will announce the nominees' portfolios only after they are confirmed. It is likely that a Minister of Petroleum Resources will be named, for the first time since Obasanjo took office in 1999.

The List of Nominees

2. On Tuesday, July 5, the Senate was called from vacation to reconvene for a special session to approve President Obasanjo's list of 11 ministerial nominees. The Senate however deferred approving the nominees until Wednesday, July 6, to be able to interview the nominees before approving the list.

3. The list of nominees includes Chief Bayo Ojo (Kogi); Dr. Edmund Daukoru (Bayelsa); Rahman Olusegun Mimiko (Ondo); Mallam Yahaya Abdulkarim (Zamfara); Mrs. Obiageli "Oby" Ezekwesili (Anambra); Helen Esuene (Akwa Ibom); Halima Tayo Alao (Kwara); Ahmed Abdulhameed (Jigawa); Mariam Ciroma (Borno); Itoto Joseph (Edo); and Fidelis Tapgun (Plateau). Note: Ministerial nomination adheres to the "federal character" concept, meaning that each of the 36 states of the federation must be represented in the cabinet. End Note.

Another Plus for the Economic Team

4. Still basking in the euphoria of the debt relief deal announced last week by the Paris Club (Ref A), the economic management team has received another plus by the nomination of Oby Ezekwesili, Senior Special Assistant to the President, as a minister. She is a member of the economic team and heads the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU), popularly called the "Due Process Office." The Due Process office is responsible for vetting government procurement; Oby has often announced that her office has been able to save the Nigerian treasury billions of dollars that would have been lost through inflated contracts.

An Oil Minister, At Last

5. Dr. Daukoru will likely assume office as Minister of Petroleum Resources, a position that Obasanjo has held himself since 1999, attracting much public criticism. Daukoru is presently the Special Advisor on Energy and Petroleum. The timing of his appointment might be related with Nigeria's turn to assume the presidency of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) next year: according to OPEC's rules, only substantive petroleum ministers can hold office as president of the organization. Daukoru's appointment may also be related to the ongoing impeachment attempt in the National Assembly (Ref B), which lists Obasanjo's failure to appoint a minister of petroleum resources as an impeachable offence.

6. Chief Bayo Ojo, Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), a telecommunications lawyer, is the President of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA). He is tipped to be the Attorney General and Minister of Justice. The position is currently held by Chief Akin Olujimi, whose tenure

has attracted much criticism from the legal profession for his awkward interpretation of the law.

17. Rahman Olusegun Mimiko will likely be appointed as Minister of Housing to replace the former minister, Chief (Mrs.) Mobolaji Osomo, who was removed due to the scandal that arose from the sale of federal government houses in Lagos. The ministry of housing has been without a minister since Mrs. Osomo's sack in March 2005, and the person initially nominated as a replacement from her home state, Ondo, did not pass the Senate screening exercise.

Comment

18. Though the portfolio to be assigned to the ministerial nominees is yet to be made public, the elevation of Oby Ezekwesili to minister is a boost to the economic management team. There is no likelihood that any member of the economic team will be replaced in the cabinet reshuffle, but rather that the economic team will have a stronger voice in the cabinet. As has been the custom during the Obasanjo presidency, he will only assign portfolios when the nominees have been cleared by the Senate. Post will provide biographical data on the new appointees septel.
CAMPBELL